

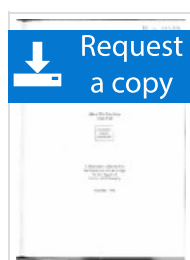


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The concept of holiness in the book of Ezekiel.



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Abstract

The theme of holiness is prominent in the book of Ezekiel. This fact should not be surprising, given that Ezekiel is said to be a priest. However, a number of passages in the book express ideas about holiness that relate specifically to Ezekiel's exilic setting. The present thesis examines how the concept of holiness is used in these oracles to provide an explanation of Israel's disaster and to prophesy the nation's restoration. Chapter 1 discusses the methodology of the thesis with reference to previous scholarly study of the book.

of Ezekiel. As in other areas of OT study, recent research has seen a polarization into diachronic and synchronic approaches. The present work generally adopts a synchronic approach, and particular emphasis is placed on rhetorical criticism as a means of discerning coherent blocks of text. This has the added benefit of highlighting those literary features that are particularly important for the interpretation of the passages being studied. The next four chapters present the main argument of the thesis. Chapter 2 examines Ezek. 20:5-26 for its literary structure and thence deduces the main themes of the passage. The point is that Yahweh's election of the people involves a promise of land, but that this promise could not yet be fulfilled because of the people's being defiled. However, Yahweh refrains from destroying his people completely in order to preserve the holiness of his own name. Chapter 3 turns to the theme of the "mythic mountain", whereby mountain imagery is employed to signify the land. Three concepts underlie Ezekiel's use of this metaphor: this mythic mountain represents the land of Israel; this land is seen as Yahweh's sanctuary; and the land is the place of Israel's inheritance. The mountain thus symbolizes the hope of the ideal future in which Yahweh, the people and the land are brought together. Chapter 4 examines the allegorical portrayal of the city of Jerusalem as a prostitute in Ezek. 16 and 23. These chapters are similar in many ways, but differ in one important respect: while Ezek. 23 focuses on the sins of the people of the city, Ezek. 16 adopts the perspective of Jerusalem as place Yahweh's sanctuary. The sins of prostitution and adultery in these chapters represent idolatry and the illicit political alliances which Jerusalem forges with the peoples of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. These chapters thus show how such "prostitution" opposes Yahweh's plans for holiness just as literal prostitution jeopardizes a marriage. At the same time, the dual focus on people and land as being married to Yahweh demonstrates again the tripartite nature of the relationship in the prophet's thinking. The contrasting themes of scattering and gathering, which are presented in a number of passages in Ezekiel, are then discussed in Chapter 5. These themes occur in a set pattern which demonstrates a significant degree of authorial (or redactional) skill. Thus it is reasonable to regard the ideas found in these several passages as a single point of view. It emerges that scattering and gathering depict the exile and restoration as affecting all parties in the tripartite relationship. Moreover, these themes constitute two parts of Yahweh's plan to achieve the state of holiness. The final result of these developments represents not only a return of the people to the land, but also a fulfilment of the original intention behind Yahweh's election of the people: the sanctification of the people, the land and Yahweh's name. Chapter 6 draws some conclusions from the preceding discussion. To Ezekiel, holiness is used in a broad sense. All forms of sin lead to the loss of the people's holiness, just as holiness brings about blessing on every aspect of life. Holiness is not merely seen as a cultic concern, but is an outworking of the motives and desires of the people. It is Yahweh's pursuit of holiness which causes the people to be "scattered" into exile. In the same way, however, the holiness of Yahweh's name provides the assurance of a transformation of the people and their future "gathering" to their land. The theme of holiness is prominent in the book of Ezekiel. This fact should not be surprising, given that Ezekiel is said to be a priest. 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